



## Chapter 4

# SEARCHING FOR EXCELLENCE IN A NEW AGE

*"There is good news from America. Good management today is not resident only in Japan. But, more importantly, the good news comes from treating people decently and asking them to shine, and from producing things that work . . .*

*"[E]xcellent companies seem to take all kinds of special trouble to foster, nourish, and care for what we call 'product champions' — those individuals who believe so strongly in their ideas that they take it on themselves to damn the bureaucracy and maneuver their projects through the system and out to the customer.*

*"Someone piped up: 'Champions! Our problem is we can't kill them.'"<sup>1</sup>*



**L**ike the authors of *In Search of Excellence*, who sifted through American management looking for businesses that matched their philosophy of efficiency, the Tulsa District entered the modern age searching for better ways to do its job.

The trend was toward leaner, but not meaner, management — killing sacred cows, not champions. And in the champion-building style of the private companies cited by *In Search of Excellence*, before the end of its first 50 years, the District was chosen as the first Corps "Model District," a Corps' pseudonym for a laboratory for management innovations.

### SIXTEEN LEAN YEARS.

But first the challenge was to survive the years between 1970 and 1986, when water resource construction programs virtually shut down in the United States.

Sixteen fat years of record civil works construction in the Tulsa District, from the mid-1950s through the 1960s, were followed by 16 lean years. Between 1970 and 1986, Congress approved no omnibus water bills. And no major civil works projects were authorized for the Tulsa District.

The last project into the pipeline, Arcadia Dam near Oklahoma City, was authorized in 1970. Arcadia was one of only four new construction starts in the country during the Carter Administration (1977- 1981).<sup>2</sup>

The sailing was far from smooth for even authorized projects, such as four dams on tributaries of the Verdigris River northwest of Tulsa. Skiatook, Birch, Candy, and Sand Creek dams were authorized in 1962. All were in Osage County where the Osage Indian Tribe owns the right to oil that lies beneath the land surface.

When the Corps determined the area that would be flooded by Skiatook Lake and began negotiations, the Indians' asking price for the mineral rights was so far above Corps' offers that there was no hope of agreement without condemnation proceedings. But a court decision in another state held that no federal agency could condemn Indian lands without specific authorization by an act of Congress. The Justice Department — and thereby the Corps — decided to abide by that court decision.

Negotiations proceeded with the help of Tulsa's congressional delegation: U.S. Sens. David Boren and Don Nickles, and Tulsa-area Reps. James R. Jones and Mike Synar. Ultimately, Boren pledged to withhold his support for building Candy Lake, placing Candy on indefinite hold; and the Osage Council agreed to accept an offer of \$7.2 million (as compared to the \$4.3 million Corps' offer). By the time the Corps completed subsequent negotiations with 84 individual oil lease operators, the cost of Skiatook mineral rights had risen to nearly \$15 million.<sup>3</sup>

### 1986 OMNIBUS WATER BILL.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Col. Patete said dramatically on Nov. 17, 1986, "I am pleased to announce that President Reagan signed the Water Resources Development Act of 1986 at 1:30 p.m. today."<sup>4</sup>

